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Pa. lawmakers are pushing voter ID again. What happened in other states may surprise you.

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Key Points

- Senate Bill 1 would mandate voter ID each time a person casts a ballot.
- The Senate Republican Majority Leader says this is a "very basic and simple step to ensure that we have integrity within our electoral system."
- Voter rights advocates argue these sorts of laws can disenfranchise people, particularly in communities of color.
- A new study and recent history shed new light on this controversial topic.

A long-standing fight over election processes in Pennsylvania seems poised for yet another brutal round in the Legislature.

Identified as a top priority by Republicans in the Pennsylvania Senate, mandatory voter ID has elicited its share of emotional arguments. But a new study and recent history suggest it may be neither cure nor poison for the electoral system.

"I think if we're being honest with ourselves here," state Sen. Dan Laughlin (R-Erie) said, "there's a little bit of exaggeration going on on both sides."

What does Pa. Senate Bill 1 do?

Laughlin is a co-sponsor of Senate Bill 1, an attempt to amend the state constitution by a voter referendum. The bill would ask Pennsylvanians to:

> Open a two-year window beyond the statute of limitations for abuse survivors to sue their perpetrators.

Require new regulations to pass the Legislature before they're enacted.
Mandate voter ID each time a person casts a ballot.

Current Pennsylvania law states that ID is required only when a person is voting for the first time or is using a new precinct. Both this measure and the regulatory approval change are expected to face broad opposition from Democrats in the Legislature.

Why is voter ID a GOP priority?

Senate Republican Majority Leader Joe Pittman said he supports voter ID because it "provides a greater layer of protection and certainty" in elections. He noted that registration rolls aren't always immediately updated when a person dies or moves to a new precinct.

"It is a very basic and simple step to ensure that we have integrity within our electoral system," Pittman said.

"It's a top priority for us as a Senate Republican majority. It polls very popularly among the electorate."

Is voter ID unconstitutional?

The GOP is using the constitutional amendment, in part, because a similar law had been deemed unconstitutional.

The National Conference of State Legislatures notes that the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania struck down a 2012 law in this vein. A majority total of 36 other states across America already require photo ID, an affidavit or subsequent verification of identification.

Look Ahead America, founded in 2017 by an ex-campaign staffer for former President Donald Trump, has been lobbying for many of those changes.

According to Executive Director Matt Braynard, his team has met with state representatives and senators across America as part of their efforts, including in Pennsylvania. About two dozen states have announced new election-related bills since 2021, and nearly half of them have become law, he said.

"If you don't have ID, the least of concerns in your life is getting to vote once every few years," said Braynard, who's among those who've advanced Trump's dismissed claims of a

stolen 2020 election. "So many things require that, (including) employment."

These mandates are troubling to voter rights groups, such as those at Pennsylvania Voice. Executive Director Salewa Ogunmefun said she believes these kinds of laws are explicitly designed to disenfranchise communities of color.

"We challenge (lawmakers) to look at policies that actually modernize elections," Ogunmefun added.

Ogunmefun's organization — a partnership of 50-plus groups committed to building an "inclusive, just and reflective democracy" in the commonwealth — contends that voter ID leads to longer lines and wait times at many polling places. Her group is instead lobbying for same-day voter registration and early in-person voting.

"We are committed to making (voting) easier, not harder," Ogunmefun said.

Is a voter ID requirement popular?

The prospect of voter ID advancing to the ballot seems tenuous at best in Pennsylvania's House of Representatives, where Democrats will hold a slim, two-seat majority once new members are seated from the special elections held earlier this month.

"House Democrats oppose any effort to make voting harder. Expanding the state’s existing voter ID requirement makes it more difficult for our neighbors who are already legally registered to vote — from seniors to students to residents in urban areas — to exercise their right," Pennsylvania House Democratic Caucus spokesperson Nicole Reigelman said in a statement.

The measure's odds of being enacted would seem to improve if it advances to the ballot.

A 2021 Franklin & Marshall College poll suggested that 74% of all Pennsylvanians support photo ID requirements for voting. The college stated that the survey was conducted after "months of Republican-led efforts in many states across the country to change voting laws in response to false claims made by former President Donald Trump and his GOP allies that the 2020 election was stolen from him."

Have voter ID laws reduced turnout?

In places where new voter ID laws have recently been implemented, it seems difficult to gauge how many were discouraged from voting in the same way it's difficult to gauge whether any potential fraud was prevented.

Georgia voters — now required to show a driver's license or other ID instead of a signature to request a mailed ballot — turned out in high numbers on the heels of more restrictive laws first implemented for the 2022 midterms and runoff election. Peach State Republicans touted this as evidence that voter ID doesn't disenfranchise the electorate.

Democrats argued that strong turnout doesn't tell the full story.

"Now there will be those both in our state, and across the country, who will point to our victory tonight and try to use it to argue there is no voter suppression in Georgia," Democratic U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.) said in the aftermath of his re-election win. "The fact that millions of Georgians endured hours in lines — and were willing to spend hours in line, lines that wrapped around buildings and went on for blocks, lines in the cold, lines in the rain — is most certainly not a sign voter suppression does not exist."

A study released this month by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, which bills itself as "one of the world's most-cited and comprehensive multidisciplinary scientific journals," offers an explanation for Democratic wins in the face of these laws: The Republican enthusiasm bump may be negated by freshly motivated voting blocs who feel targeted by the legislation.

"The first laws implemented produced a Democratic advantage, which weakened to near zero after 2012," the authors stated. "We conclude that voter ID requirements motivate and mobilize supporters of both parties, ultimately mitigating their anticipated effects on election results."

But in Pennsylvania, with both sides seemingly entrenched on the emotional ends of the argument, voter ID could be destined to create more gridlock before it ever serves as another case study on the controversy.

"I'm not one of these folks that thinks there's massive voter fraud or anything like that going on," Laughlin said. "But what is real is there's a large swath of our voter public that is losing faith. Having voter ID eases a lot of their fears."

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